



Brian Simmons  
United Food and Commercial Workers Union Local 371  
Labor & Public Employees Committee Public Hearing  
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## **SB 938 AN ACT CONCERNING UNEMPLOYMENT FOR STRIKING WORKERS**

Good afternoon, Senator Kushner, Representative Sanchez, Senator Sampson, Representative Ackert, and the distinguished members of the Labor & Public Employees Committee. My name is Brian Simmons, I live in Waterbury. Since 2020, I have worked as a union representative for the UFCW Local 371 and prior to that, I was a member of Local 371 for over twenty years. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 938.

In the spring of 2019, my coworkers and I voted to go on strike from our jobs at Stop and Shop. This was not a decision we took lightly, and the last strike at Stop and Shop lasted one day in 1988. We were naturally afraid to take this vote, but our employer left us with no choice. We were faced with the elimination of our pension as we knew it, the elimination of insurance benefits for our spouses, and unacceptable wages.

For those eleven days in April, 2019, I was the strike captain for several stores around the Waterbury area. Our shoppers were incredibly supportive, and it quickly became apparent that our employer was not going to be able to find enough replacement workers to keep most stores operable. However, as the days stretched on, and one week turned to two, I could sense the panic in the faces of my coworkers. Many of us live paycheck to paycheck (I don't know too many people who don't).

If we had been able to collect unemployment, one of two things would have happened. Perhaps we would have been able to hold out just a little bit longer and secured a better agreement, as it was clear we were winning the strike when it came to our shoppers, the store's business, and public opinion. But more than likely, it would have meant we never would have had to go on strike in the first place. I believe our employer thought we would fold sooner than we did. I have never been prouder to be a member of our union and ultimately our resolution was a good one but I would have preferred that the employer knew we were strong before pushing us to a point where we had no choice but to walk out. If they knew we could have held out for an even stronger deal and collected unemployment benefits after two weeks, they might have reconsidered their proposal to decimate our benefits.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.